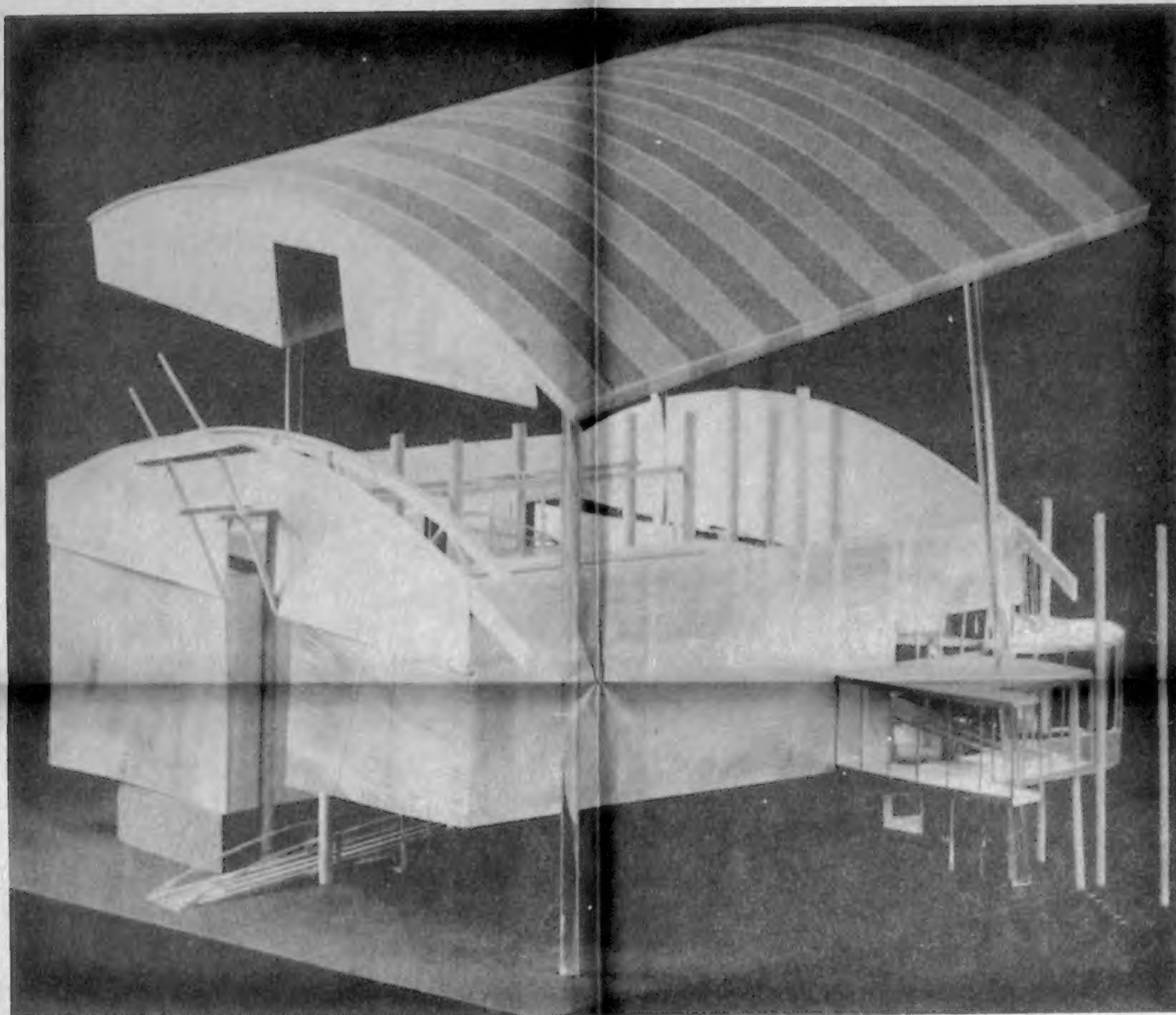


“Metamorphosis”

Peter Cook and Christine Hawley

from London



Peter Cook and Christine Hawley The Glass Museum, Langen, West Germany, 1986

September 8-October 8, 1988

Gallery Hours
Wed.-Sun. 12-6 PM

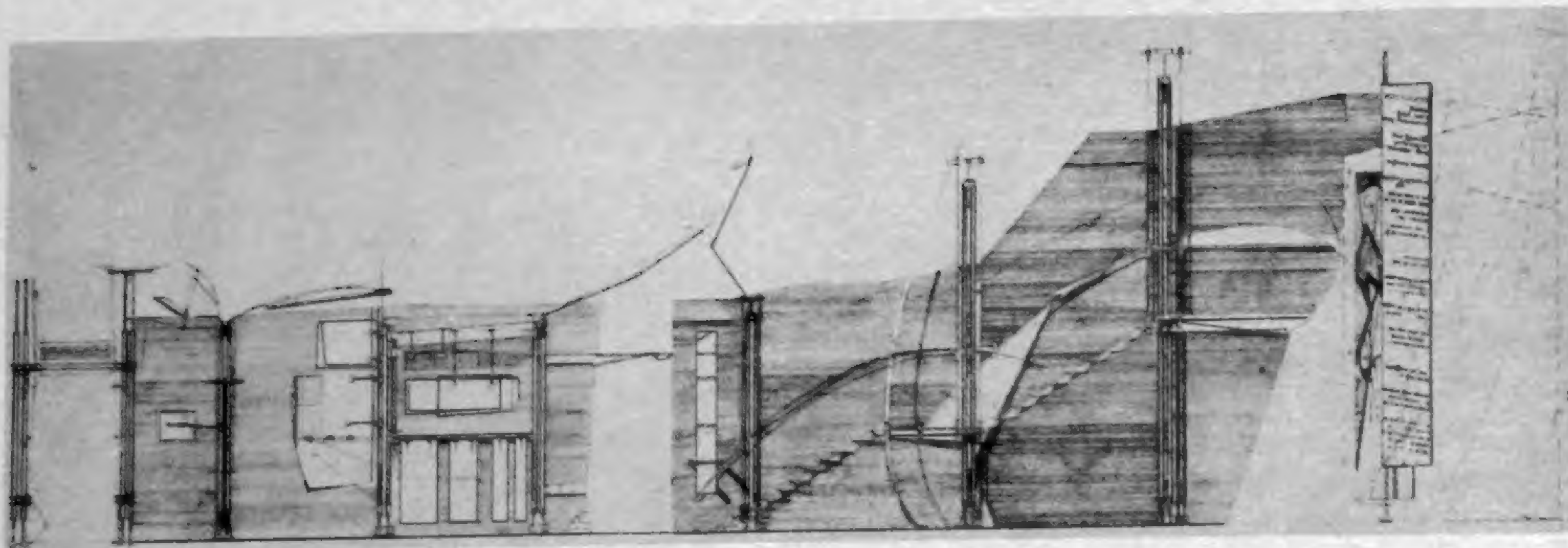
Opening Reception
September 8, 7-9 PM

Way Out West: a project for Berlin/Cook
Burnt Iron-Rotting Wood: a project for Peckham/Hawley
Glass Museum: a project for Langen/Cook and Hawley

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Christine Hawley Burnt Iron-Rotting Wood, Peckham, London

biomechanical synthesis, possible for the first time in history, is a crucial factor in this advance.

Architecture has always been an instrument for acquiring knowledge. In its composition and construction, architecture has represented to human beings their most comprehensive knowledge at a given time. In representing this knowledge in a summary way, they acquire a new type of knowledge, a knowledge of knowledge itself, an epistemology, essential to a comprehension of their own place in the world. When knowledge was believed to be complete and static, as in the theological and aristocratic culture, then architecture itself was perfected and final. But in the present epoch knowledge is held to be less certain, more conditional. Relativity and quantum theory have erased the line between presumably objective and subjective categories of experience, identifying the observer with the observed in a unified field of experience which would formerly have been considered paradoxical and self-contradictory, and that now can be expressed, hence fully experience, hence known, in a new synthetic architectonic instrumentation. One significant manifestation of this instrumentation is the biomechanical mode.

The experimental architecture of Peter Cook has, over the past twenty years, been increasingly concerned with the development of biomechanical tectonics and an analysis of their formations. In the Way Out West (WOW) project for Berlin, the biological principle transcends a merely analogical or allegorical service (to which it was put in comparable Art Nouveau and expressionist works) to become fully interactive within given architectural technics and mechanics.

Cook's method is composed in two essential stages. The first stage is the establishment of formal dualities, as in the laying of a Cartesian field over an existing and more indeterminate urban fields, or the opposition of various kinetic and static structures. In the second stage, he posits an interaction between these complementary forms and energies resulting from both consonances and dissonances appearing in the initial juxtaposition. Significantly, he takes pains to insure that the inevitable metamorphosis of the original opposing forms does not destroy utterly essential characteristics of their separate identities and functions, even as he induces blurring of the formal lines between them by the laying on of new tissues—skins, nets and screens. In this way he maintains an internal contradiction essential to the whole assembly, one stimulating further metamorphosis, further blurring, further interaction. The biological principle is observed exactly here. The constituent parts increase their autonomy by contrast, even as they become

increasingly subordinated to the whole. The test of this is that in an advanced metamorphic state, the elements of the tectonic maintain clearly discernible forms, yet are woven so inextricably into the matrix that one can no longer devise their excision from the whole form.

It is revealing to observe the role played by biological material in Cook's thought experiments. In one sense the introduction of carbon-based organisms—trees, shrubs, vines, grass—is superfluous to the experiment, even anachronistic. The architectonic, silicon- and metal-based organisms have almost supplanted them, becoming a new, "second nature," a more highly evolved animated form. Almost, but not quite. However one can read their movement and change in the sequential frames of the analytical drawings, this architecture is not yet self-animating, self-repairing, self-reflexive and -reflective. This affirms its humanistic purpose. Its "life" still depends on external and natural sources of energy and power, for which the intrusion of biological, living material is representative and characteristic, catalytically insinuating itself into just those points of interface between active mechanical elements that will induce a metamorphic chain reaction. Likewise, their animation depends on the direction of carbon-based intelligence, the human beings for whom all this elaborate instrumentation has been created to at once enable and embody conscious experience.

The epistemological implication of such projects are clear. The human experience they encourage, the knowledge they embody tends toward a unified conception of the world. This unity is not, however, of the old, perfected, statically secure kind, yielding pure and always self-consistent geometries of purpose and expression. The old epistemologies could never rationalize the biological principle of change, which is continual and continuous. Rather, it is a new, paradoxical unity, always kinetic, ambiguous, elusive and conditional, and of a different degree of internal consistency and organization, and self-manifestation in the mathematics of the unpredictable and continuous diversity characteristic of living things.

So, too, with the Peckham project of Christine Hawley. More modest in scope and intention, this project for the construction of housing among derelict buildings in South London interweaves a new, rational tectonic with a tectonic for all practical purposes formed—or deformed—by entropic processes of decay. The new and nominally orthogonal architectonic order is immediately distorted by the necessary contact with the already advanced distortions of the older architectonic, the already ruined buildings.

neglected are—in which live many frustrated and underprivileged people—can look at its rotting and decaying world. She observes the patinas and forms of pieces of iron, wood, graffiti and the tumble-down architecture and creates a series of architectural parts that are her own invention, but clearly also part of this Peckham atmosphere. A series of photographs and metal-wood-paint constructions act as the main 'drawings' of the scheme, which is basically for housing.

The Glass Museum was designed two years ago for the town of Langen in West Germany, and is in the tradition of the American 'art shed' rather than the heroic and European tradition of the museum-as-monument. It is faced in aluminum and consists of a series of light-tight galleries linked by glass ramps. The northern side of the building is calm and mysterious and the southern side is open and exuberant. The collection of 20th century stained glass, for which it is designed, must act as a central part of this architectural 'layering.'

The projects for Berlin and Peckham are newly completed. The Glass Museum has been extensively published and has been exhibited in Europe, but this is its first American showing.

Peter Cook is professor and Head of the Architectural Department of the Städtische Hochschule für Kunst und Gestaltung in Frankfurt. He is also closely involved in the Architectural Association in London. A founding member of the 1960s group 'Archigram,' he has created many controversial and frequently imitated works since that time.

Christine Hawley is Head of the School of Architecture in Northeast London Polytechnic (the first woman to head a British School). She too taught at the AA for 11 years, and has produced many projects that have been published in nearly every architectural magazine, worldwide.

Cook and Hawley have worked together for 11 years and both (at different times) studied at the Architectural Association. They have been guest professors in the USA, Australia, Japan, Scandinavia and Germany, but despite their reputations as teachers and critics see themselves primarily as design-architects.

Principal assistant: C.J. Lim
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Peter Cook and Christine Hawley: An introduction

Of the several evident counter-propositions to an art-historical basis for architecture, the biomechanical remains one of the most promising but least developed. The idea of an actual union between the biological processes pervading nature and the mechanical processes invented by human beings indicates a desire and, perhaps, a capacity to unify in a single process two principles of the organization of matter and energy historically held apart and even regarded as inimical of one another. The tradition of man versus nature duality gives way to a synthesis of man and nature, representing a newer and higher stage in the evolution of both. This subject is a favorite in the field of cybernetics. Machines that can repair themselves, adapt themselves to changing conditions and even possess the properties of active intelligence are at present under development. In fact it is only with the advent of such machines that human being will be able to explore domains of the physical extremes of distance, time and dimension. As the acquiring of knowledge seems the unique destiny of human beings, their development of ever-higher forms of instrumentation, extending experience, will inevitably continue. The potential for



Peter Cook and Christine Hawley The Glass Museum, Langen, West Germany.

